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AUTHOR Tanaka, Sachiyo
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ABSTRACT

Two experiments investigated causes of children's selection of easy tasks in task choice situations. Experiment 1 probed the effects of experimenter presence on task choices of 55 Japanese children ranging in age from 66 to 76 months, of whom 32 were boys and 23 were girls. A total of 30 subjects were assigned to an experimenter attending condition and 25 were assigned to an experimenter absent condition. In the task choice situation, children chose one of three puzzles differing in difficulty level from easy to hard. Findings indicated that young children chose an easy task in the experimenter present condition, and tasks which were other than easy in the experimenter absent condition. Experiment 2 investigated effects of the presence of friends on young children's task choices. Subjects were 25 children ranging in age from 70 to 81 months, of whom 15 were boys and 10 were girls. Stories about a personified rabbit's task choice in the presence and absence of friends were told to subjects in individual test sessions; subjects were asked which task they would choose if they were in the rabbit's situation. In both conditions, subjects chose moderate or difficult tasks. It is concluded that the influence of the presence of others on young children's task choice depends on who the others are. (RH)

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Effects of other attending on young children's task choices.

Sachiyo Tanaka
Miyamoto 95-10, Daizenji-machi,
Kurume-shi, Fukuoka 839-01
Japan

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Introduction

Many studies report that young children tend to choose an easy task (e.g., Sears & Levin, 1957 ; Eishiima, 1973). Nicholls (1980) reveals that young children choose an easy task in which the chance of success is greatest, because their attention is directed to success only. That is, young children do not yet understand the relationship between the task difficulty level and the success incentive value of the task (success in a more difficult task is of greater value). In another his paper (Nicholls, 1984), his mention is as follows ; adults' task choices vary with task choice situations so as to demonstrate high ability to self or to others. In the ego-involvement situation, task is chosen to demonstrate high ability (success) to others. So an easy task in which the chance of success is greatest is preferred to choose. In the task-involvement situation,

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task is chosen to demonstrate high ability to self. So an easy task is not preferred to choose, because an easy task is not interesting to them. Nicholls (1984) also mentions that young children lack the differentiated conception which enables them to consider other. However, there are some studies which report that young children behave differently in the other attending and the other no-attending situations, though the object areas of those studies differ from task choice (e.g., Hamazaki, 1985). From these results, it is thinkable that young children can consider other and choose an easy task to demonstrate high ability (success) to other. That is, young children's easy task choices are not caused by their no-understanding the relationship between the task difficulty level and the incentive value of the task, but by their consideration of other. This study examines this issue by investigating young children's task choices in the other attending and the other no-attending situations. The hypotheses are as follows : If young children's easy task choices are caused by their consideration of other, they will choose an easy task in the other attending situation. However, they will not choose an easy task in the other no-attending situation. If young children's easy task choices are caused by their no-understanding the relationship between the task difficulty level and the incentive value ofthe task, they will choose an easy task in

both situations.

In Experiment 1, experimenter is selected as other, because task choice situations of studies which report that young children tend to choose an easy task are experimenter attending situations. In Experiment 2, effects of the quality of other on young children's task choices are examined. Friends are selected as others, because friends seem to become important surroundings for young children.

Experiment 1

The purpose of Experiment 1 is to investigate effects of the experimenter attending situation on young children's task choices.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 55 6-year-olds with a mean age of 72 months and ranging in age from 66 to 76 months. Thirty-two were boys and 23 were girls. They were divided into the experimenter attending situation (30) and the experimenter no-attending situation (25).

Task

Tasks were jigsaw puzzles with three difficulty levels.

Three difficulty levels were easy, moderate and difficult. These tasks were shown to subjects contained with three small boxes (This presentation way was the same as Nicholls' (1980)). Three small boxes' size and color were the same (size---10cm × 10cm × 10cm ; color---white).

Procedure

Subjects were tested individually. The experimenter led the subject in one of kindergarten's rooms and made familiar with the subject. < Experimenter attending situation > The experimenter said to the subject " I bring games which you can play " and presented to the subject three small boxes which, the subject was told, contained games with three difficulty levels. The placement of the box which contained a moderate game was always in the middle but the left-right placement of the boxes which contained an easy and a difficult games was alternated. The experimenter explained the subject which box contained an easy, a moderate or a difficult game pointing to each box. " This box contains an easy game. " " This box contains a moderate game. " " This box contains a difficult game. " At that time, cards with " easy ", " moderate " and " difficult " were placed on the appropriate boxes. The order of instruction of the box which contained a moderate game was always last, but the order of instruction of the boxes which contained an easy and a difficult games was alternated. After

instruction, a retention test of it was conducted. All subjects remembered which box contained an easy, a moderate or a difficult task. Then the experimenter asked the subject " You can play one of these games. Which one would you like to do ? " The subject chose a game to do and that game's difficulty level was recorded. < Experimenter no-attending situation > The experimenter said to the subject " I bring a toy to play with you. However, I do not yet prepare it. While I prepare it in another room, play one of these games in this room (at this time, the experimenter showed three small boxes which contained games with three difficulty levels)." After explanation of these boxes, the experimenter left the room leaving the subject alone. While the experimenter was in another room, the subject chose a game to do and played it. That game's difficulty level was recorded. After the subject chose a game and played it for a while, the experimenter turned back and played with the subject.

Result

Table 1 shows subjects' task choices in the experimenter attending and the experimenter no-attending situations. The rate of subjects who choose an easy task in the experimenter attending situation is compared with that in the experimenter no-attending situation by chi-square test.

A significant chi-squre was obtained ($\chi^2 = 4.86$, df = 1, $p < .05$). While most subjects in the experimenter attending situation choose an easy task, about half of subjects in the experimenter no-attending situation choose a moderate or a difficult task.

Experiment 2

The prupose of Experiment 2 is to investigate effects of the friends attending situation on young children's task choices. The friends attending and the friends no-attending situations are formed by picture stories in order to remove effects of the relationship between decoy friends and the subject, which varies with the subject.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 25 6-year-olds with a mean age of 72 months and ranging in age from 70 to 81 months. Fifteen were boys and 10 were girls.

Picture story

Two picture stories were used ; the friends attending story and the friends no-attending story. Personified little rabit (Pyonta or Pyonko) was a hero (or a hero-

ine). His (or her) age and sex corresponded those of the subject. Picture stories' outlines were as follows. < The friends no-attending story > Pyonta (or Pyonko) is going to play games in his (or her) room alone. He (or she) has three games with three difficulty levels ; easy, moderate and difficult. He (or she) is puzzled which game he (or she) is going to play. < The friends attending story > Pyonta (or Pyonko) is playing with his (or her) friends in kindergarten's playground. They are playing the game in order. The game consists of three courses. Those difficulty levels are easy, moderate and difficult. Players can select one of them to do. In Pyonta's (or Pyonko's) turn, he (or she) is puzzled which course he (or she) selects. There are friends in his (or her) surrounding.

Procedure

Subjects were tested individually. The experimenter led the subject in one of kindergarten's rooms and made familiar with the subject. Then the experimenter told the subject two picture stories. After each picture story, the experimenter asked the subject " If you were Pyonta (or Pyonko), which game would you select ? " The subject's answer was recorded. Thus, every subject heard two picture stories and answered two questions. The order of two picture stories was alternated.

Results

Table 2 shows subjects' task choices in the friends attending and the friends no-attending situations. The rate of subjects who choose an easy task in the friends attending situation is compared with that in the friends no-attending situation by a test of matched ratios' difference (Iwahara, 1981). As a result, task choices in the friends attending situation are not different from those in the friends no-attending situation significantly (p = .548). As shown in Table 2, more than half of subjects in both situations choose a moderate or a difficult task.

Discussion

In Experiment 1, young children's task choices in the experimenter attending situation differed from those in the experimenter no-attending situation. They choose an easy task in the experimenter attending situation, while they do not choose an easy task in the experimenter no-attending situation. From this result, it is concluded that young children's easy task choices are not caused by their no-understanding the relationship between the task difficulty level and the success incentive value of the task but by their consideration of other. Young children might know

such a relationship and use the knowledge according to situations.

In Experiment 2, there is no difference between task choices in the friends attending and the friends no-attending situations. In both situations, subjects choose a moderate or a difficult task. From this result, it is concluded that young children do not mind friends-attending. These age children might not mind friends-attending more than experimenter-attending. Effects of other attending on young children's task choices seem to depend on who other is.

By the way, there is one problem in Experiment 2. It is that the friends no-attending and the friends attending situations are not the actual ones but the hypothetical ones, and picture stories are spoken by the experimenter. Therefore, there is fear of effects of experimenter attending in these situations. But, the same tendency of task choices is got in the alone situations in Experiment1 (the experimenter no-attending situation) and 2 (the friends no -attending situaiton) ; in both situations, young children choose a moderate or a difficult task. Thus, it is possible to say that young children do not mind experimenter attending and answer questions without pressure of experimenter in the picture story situations.

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Table 1

The number of task choices in the experimenter attending and the experimenter no-attending situations

	Task choice			
Situation	E	M	D	Total
Experimenter attending	24	2 6	4	30
Experimenter no-attending	13	8 12	4	25

Table 2

The number of task choices in the friends attending and the friends no-attending situations

	Task choice			
Situation	E	M	D	Total
Friends attending	7	13 18	5	25
Friends no-attending	10	10 15	5	25

Note.

E means an easy task.

M means a moderate task.

D means a difficult task.